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Government and Politics Watch

Tracking the intersection of government and charity

December 02, 2008

Two Charity Heads Among Leaders Advising Obama on Innovation

Two charity leaders have been appointed to a group of more than 30 people that has been asked to help the incoming Obama administration devise an “innovation agenda.”

They are: Cheryl Dorsey, president of Echoing Green, in New York, which provides fellowships to entrepreneurial nonprofit leaders; and Paul Schmitz, president of Public Allies, in Milwaukee, which trains young people for nonprofit and public-service careers.

Their group — the Technology, Innovation, and Government Reform Policy Working Group — will recommend ways to modernize government; use technology to expand the economy and solve pressing national problems; and promote “active citizenship” and government partnerships with civil-society organizations, according to the Obama transition project’s [Web site](#).

President-elect Barack Obama has special ties to Public Allies: he served on its founding board, and his wife, Michelle, opened the group’s Chicago office in 1993. (See *The Chronicle’s* [article](#) about the organization and its ties to the Obamas.)

The working group also includes Michele Jolin, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, in Washington, who has publicly advocated creating a White House Office of Social Entrepreneurship. She made the proposal in a [chapter](#) of a “progressive blueprint” that was co-published last month by the Center for American Progress Action Fund, the liberal think tank’s advocacy arm. She said it would give innovative nonprofit leaders a “greater voice in the public policy debates of the day.”

Howard W. Buffett, the grandson of Warren Buffett, the investor and philanthropist, is another member of the group. Mr. Buffett is an adviser to the United Nations Office for Partnerships, which promotes alliances between the UN, foundations, and businesses, and head of Cliffspringer, his own strategic-advisory group. His father, Howard G. Buffett, runs a foundation in Decatur, Ill.

Sonal Shah, head of global development at Google.org, the search-engine company’s philanthropic arm, co-chairs the group, along with Blair Levin, managing director of Stifel Nicolaus, a financial-services firm; and Julius

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Genachowski, co-founder of Rock Creek Ventures, a new-media investment company.

The working group is divided into four committees: Innovation and government, innovation and national priorities, innovation and science, and innovation and civil society. Spokesmen for the Obama transition team declined to say who would serve on the committees or give any other information beyond what appears on the Web site.

On the campaign trail, Mr. Obama said he would expand national-service programs, establish a Social Entrepreneurship Agency to coordinate federal programs that help innovative charities, and create new funds to stimulate entrepreneurial social projects.

— [Suzanne Perry](#)

Tuesday December 2, 2008 | [Permalink](#)

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